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19 New Ottawa Speers

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I.O.D.E.

Speers, Saskatchewan



... To Our Pioneers ...

Faithful to thy tasks allotted
By the fate of pioneers;
Folk of faith—in days distressing,
Heroes of the yester years.
Gladly all thy gifts and graces
To our bairnies we shall tell
Till we all meet in the yonder
Where we ne'er shall say farewell.

Chapter One...

Previous to 1902, our district was just a quiet little spot which received a friendly nod from a passing buffalo. Earlier than 1902, any settlement north of the Saskatchewan River had been confined to—near Shellbrook, Dunn's Ranch, on the north side of Scout lake, Richard's Ranch, near the present village of Richard and Nolins' Ranch, near the Badger Bluff School.

The country was in control of the gopher, the antelope, the coyote, the badger and the sand-hill crane. Prairie fire had swept the land of bluff and all vegetation except around the lakes. Practically every year the prairie was blackened by fire sweeping away everything not covered by snow or water. Buffalo skulls and bones could be found on practically every acre of land.

There were no roads—no fences—just one main trail, the Carlton to Battleford freight trail, which passes about four miles south of the present village of Speers. Over this trail the Indians, and the Whites, had travelled during the Riel Rebellion of 1885. As recently as 1949 a number of arrow-heads were found on land over which this trail crossed.

Often times it is the Missionaries who are the forerunners of large migrations of people to new areas. So it was with the beginnings of our district. During the summer of 1902, the Rev. James Bryant journeyed across country from Battleford to Prince Albert. He was so favorably impressed that soon he had several Prince Albert people eager to see this area. A company of Prince Albert men bought up all the odd land of this district from the Canadian Pacific Railway Company. A number of half-breed families came here from Prince Albert in 1902, but none of them remained to become permanent residents as did W. J. Miller and his brother Faulconer (Faulkie to all his friends), Thomas Swain and family, Robert Adams and two sons, John and Alex Foulds and Alex Fidler.

In 1903, a party of land seekers under the leadership of Rev. Bryant arrived. Rev. W. S. Moore, of the Snake Plain Reserve and S. J. McKeen of Prince Albert, made the first search for homesteads. Rev. Moore purchased the C.P.R. section now owned by Tom and Harry Nicholson. Others arriving at this time were the McKeen brothers, John, William and Isaac, R. J. Scott, Roy Miner, J. Clark, Nat and Chester Tackaberry, J.

Ellice and V. Poncelet. Of these early arrivals R. J. Scott registered his land first. It being S.E. 4-43-11-W3rd, on November 24, 1903.

It was in 1903 that Rev. John Grenfell, of the Bell Street Church, Ottawa toured this area. He went back to his flock with such glowing reports of this prairie west that it led to a migration of his parishioners to the west. This migration from Ottawa formed the nucleus of the "New Ottawa" settlement. They took up sixty-seven homesteads in all. However, some did not stay, but of those who did are such well known names as: Baird, Stacey, Broadhead, Sarginson, Burgess, Thomas, Kerr, Bush, Webb, Curry, Hodgins, Neelin, Kinmond, Harryett, Radley and King.

In the same year Jack and Frank Langley came from near Rosthern. Ed. Moore and his family coming from the Prince Albert area. There also arrived many at this time from several parts, they included W. G. Scott, Bob Woods and his son Lloyd, Bill English, J. and A. Anderson, M. Brouseau, Wm. Bain, W. Cummings, R. Redhead, MacPherson and Dobkins.

The New Ottawa group found here a harmonious settlement of Half-breed and White families who had come mostly from Prince Albert. This gave rise to the impression that they were all of Indian blood. It was a regular joke for the Scotts, McKeens, Tackaberrys and others to be taken for Half-breeds. When these men had lived for days in the open, around camp fires and allowed their whiskers to grow, no one could be blamed for thinking as they did.

The Prince Albert settlers took land as far west as Richard's Ranch. Emile Richard and his Uncle had about 400 horses and 1100 head of cattle. To the Richard place these earliest settlers went to get their mail. It came addressed "North-West Territories", Battleford, about thirty-five miles west was the nearest town for supplies. It was also the residence of the nearest Police—the North West Mounted. They also trekked to Battleford to register their land claims.

In 1905 the Nicholsons—Tom and Harry—came, also Charles Dobbins, Herbert Boothman, Tom Vessey, A. Biggs, and Cyril Gilders. Following them in 1906 came Douglas Japp and his family. George Dove came then too, to be fol-

lowed the next year by his brothers, William and Spencer. About this time came George Ady, Walker, Cox, Baron, Straight, Collins brothers, Robert Clark Hiltz, Tony Metcalfe, Horace Smith, George Harriot, T. Eyres, Melvins, Parkinsons and Monty Young.

One of the first responsibilities thrust on these pioneers was the selection of a suitable place for, and the erection of a place of shelter. This, to be done in a climate much sterner than the most of them had ever been accustomed. The homes were log cabins or sod houses. Crude, indeed was the exterior of these quickly constructed homes, but the interior, though furnished with only a sheet metal stove, table, chairs and cupboards made from boxes which had come from the store, was clean and cozy. It was a haven of rest and comfort to many a weary land-seeker. Not frequently it proved a veritable sanctuary for a storm-stayed traveller.

Food consisted mostly of bread, beans, prunes, syrup and jam, along with lots of

salt pork. The marvel of even maintaining an existence, especially during that first winter, for these pioneer folk is truly amazing.

One of the first things that our early settlers did was to make plans for church services. These services were held at the home of Henry King, now the Charles Drabble home, the speaker being Thomas Lawson. Services were held at King's until the summer of 1905, when the Green Bluff School was built. People attended these services in many and varied ways. Some on foot, some on a stone-boat pulled either by oxen or horses. Some were on horse-back and others in wagons, with or without spring seats. No matter how they went, they went to Church!

Green Bluff was the first school house erected in this area and the second school to be built north of the Saskatchewan River. All materials for it were freighted over land from Saskatoon—as were most materials needed by any one. The round trip by team took about a week. Green Bluff's first teacher was Mr. Amos.

Chapter Two . . .

According to what we understand the first load of grain grown here was hauled to Radisson, by Roy Miner. It graded No. I and he received 50c per bushel for it.

The Swains owned the first threshing machine—a steamer. The boiler was brought from a brickyard in Prince Albert. It was the first steamer to be operated north of the Saskatchewan River.

The first store was in the Baird home, south and east of the present village of Speers. It was a real convenience to the people of the district. Likewise the first Post Office for the New Ottawa people was at the home of Henry King. In 1905 it was moved up to the store for greater convenience.

Previous to this R. J. Scott had been the mail carrier. He taught at the Twin Lakes School, near Radisson, and would bring the in-coming mail when he came home for the weekend. Then when he went back to Twin Lakes on Monday he took the out-going mail with him. His mail bag was addressed "New Ottawa". Mail for the Baird's store office was driven in by team from Maymont.

Many fine men have ministered to the spiritual needs of the district. Rev. M. M.

Culp was the first ordained man to take the charge. He performed the first wedding, uniting in marriage Fred Thomas and Sarah Hobden. At this service he performed his first baptismal when Laurie (Lawrence) and Vivian Curry were christened.

Emma King, daughter of Henry and Mrs. King, was the first to be buried in the Green Bluff Cemetery. Mr. Stacey gave a portion of his land to be the burial grounds.

The first baby to be born in the district was Florence Thomas and the first twins to be welcomed here were Mildred and Melvin, children of Mr. and Mrs. Joe Campbell.

One name that cannot be left out of a report on our district is that of Dr. John Scratch. Though not a resident of the district, he is and has been our patron saint, through all our years of ups and downs. A whole book could be written about him and the service that he has always rendered so willingly, whether there be money to pay or not. He was often helped in the early days by clever and kindly women. In his absence many a time they took charge and with much success. To mention only one of these

ladies, Mrs. Stacey, whose services are remembered by many today.

The first couple to be married in the New Ottawa Church manse were John McKeen and Bertha Smith. Rev. Culp officiated. This was a short time before the manse was moved to the site of the village of Speers.

When our senior members of the district get together they love to talk over "old times"; when men's overalls were 90c per pair. Twenty pounds of sugar cost you 95c. Men's boots were from one to two dollars per pair. A quarter of beef (hind) cost 4c per pound. Work shirts were 60c each. Then they tell you how they paid two hundred and fifty dollars each for green colts.

Many a one remembers kindnesses from Mrs. Stacey as her home became a halfway house for travellers. For those who went north from the now Speers site they received similar kindnesses from Mrs. William Curry.

Remembering too the day Clyde Tillootsen lost his team and went on foot to hunt them. It was a very cold day and for a muflier he wore a pair of long woollen drawers.

Jack and Frank Langley remember the first night in their log shack. They were awokened by a terrific wind storm. They rushed outside in time to watch their shack blow away. It managed to stay together, so the next day they hauled it back and staked it down. It stayed put then, wind or no wind!

One cold day Jack Burgess went to the Fielding Hotel to see Dr. Scratch. Jack had an aching tooth which needed attention. Doc put the forceps in a dish of warm water, and placed it on the window sill. Turned to talk to Jack and then reached for the forceps—lifted dish and all. They were frozen solid in the dish.

We were all thrilled when Mr. Swain "Daddy" lived to be one hundred and three years of age and was honoured by being given an audience by the King in 1939 while their Majesties were visiting in Canada.

Travelling and supplies were major problems of the early days. The winter of 1910 was especially severe. Folks from here and north had to go to Fielding for supplies. Mr. McGregor was the ever amiable and obliging storekeeper. Roads were so deep in drifts and snow so heavy that one had to break trail. Trains had been stalled for days. People up north were out of supplies—had not even lard

to grease bread pans. So at last, in desperation, Mr. Penrose got out his team determined to try to make Fielding. He did, only to find that Mr. McGregor's store was cleaned out of many commodities. So Mr. McGregor decided to try to make it through to Saskatoon by relays of horses. After a most eventful trip he got back to Fielding. His small load consisted of flour, lard and precious tobacco—those three prime necessities of the prairie people. You would call that service now wouldn't you? Mr. Penrose laid over in Fielding awaiting Mr. McGregor's arrival with his precious freight. There were no snowmobiles in those days!

Winter had its problems of unbroken trails, blizzards and biting frosts, but summer wasn't actually a "little lamb" either. Recalling a twenty-five mile trip with a team of oxen, typical of dozens taken by the settlers, Mr. Wallace Graham just smiles and says "some fun". He hooked the oxen onto a wagon reach and set off for Fielding—intention to bring back lumber. When he was but a few miles on his way it started to rain. Then it poured on and off, more on than off, for seven days. Such a rain as the prairie seldom sees! The new grades had just been made on the surveyed lines. The old prairie trail was plowed up, zig-zag fashion, leaving the sod to lie where they turned over. This gave the appearance of a gigantic snake, miles long, lying where the old trail used to be. The new grade was bottomless mud, so for miles he bumped over the upturned sods. In two days he reached Fielding, put on a big load of green lumber. Mr. Graham adds here that the lumber wasn't the only thing green, because without realizing it he had put on the best part of two tons. Then he called at the McGregor store for flour, sugar and salt for a neighbor, covered the whole thing with a tarpaulin and started home. This now was the fourth day from home, as Mr. Graham had stayed over in Fielding to rest the oxen. Hitched up and on the way the oxen made less than one mile and eventually lay down. After tethering the oxen so they could feed, Mr. Graham finally lay down in the wet, after he could stand no longer. He waited for day light and an opportunity to resume the journey. Coming along slowly they had come about half way up the hill on the north side of the Flats. This hill was always a place of tribulation and will be well remembered by any who had occasion to go that way. So, half way up the hill, the wagon wheels sank down to the hubs in mud and they were stuck—really stuck. They remained planted thus on the side of the hill while it thundered,

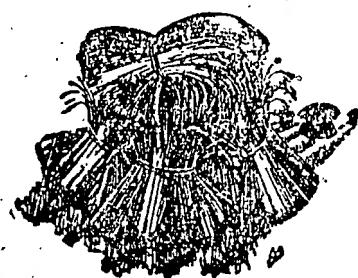
lightninged and poured. After what seemed like hours a good Samaritan, in the person of Wilbert Moore, came along. He by-passed Mr. Graham and gained the top of the hill before he unhitched his horses and came back for the Graham wagon. All hooked up, and amid shouts, the cracking of whips and the frantic urgings, the wagon came up and surged through the mud to at last reach the top of the hill. It was quite dark when the Swain Slough was reached. In the gloom it looked like a shoreless lake, with white caps slushing about, whipped up by a stiff wind. When Mr. Graham reached the slough Wilbert Moore had crossed it and was waiting to see if it would prove a further obstacle for the weary oxen. After a shouted confab Mr. Graham urged his team into the water. Well, after a dreadful struggle and much urging the oxen did get over safely. Poor oxen! Very late that night Mr. Graham arrived at the Stopping House kept by that dear old lady of revered memory, Mrs. Stacey. Here Mr. Graham stayed for two nights. The oxen were very tired, but not more than their owner. Mrs. Stacey was like a mother to wayfarers who came her way. After two days under her roof, Mr. Graham was rested and refreshed and able to resume his journey home. It took him a long way from Stacey's to his home. At midnight he arrived—seven days after he had left home!

Amid such trials and hardships sports were not forgotten. It was not "all work and no play". In 1905 the New Ottawa "Boys" had a ball team. They travelled

to Radisson on May 24th and won their game against Radisson; even if they did have to wear their overcoats while not in the field. Lloyd Woods caught and MacPherson pitched for the first team. Will Scott was one of their fielders.

Some winters found our pioneers plodding through feet of snow, while other years they had little. In 1905 there was no snow after February 20th. Will Scott had to dodge prairie fires among the Redberry Hills as he journeyed home from Prince Albert.

The men of a new district work long hard hours, clearing and breaking the land, hauling and planning for his family. So too, do the women work countless hours sewing, knitting, scrubbing and scouring to make a home for her family. It was a group of these women of-vision, organized by Mrs. Culp, who banded together to form the Ladies' Aid. The first meeting was held at the Manse. Their first executive had Mrs. Culp as President, Mrs. Henry King as Vice President. Mrs. Joe Kinmond was Secretary and the Treasurer was Mrs. Baird. While these women worked with and for the Methodist Church, a call for help for a needy family has never been rejected, no matter what religious ties they may have. Countless are the quilts and the boxes of help that have gone out—after the misfortune of fire, or need of any kind. To these ladies we owe much. May we always be worthy of the faith they had in us and our district.



Then . . .



1914 . . . Railway Avenue, Speers

Now . . .



1948 . . . Main Street, Speers

Chapter Three

The village, which is the business, social and spiritual centre of the district, did not have its beginnings until the railway went through from Prince Albert to North Battleford, in the spring of 1913. Speers is situated on N.W. 17-44-11-W3rd. It is thirty five miles east of North Battleford and one mile south of Highway 40.

On July 31, 1913, an open air picnic was held, about where the Main Street is now, saw the dedication ceremony when the name "Speers" became official, honouring Mr. C. W. Speers, a Government Immigration official who had land here. Sports, ball and general activities held forth in the afternoon. Ball was as dear to the hearts of the young men then as now. They organized a team with Will Scott pitching, Lloyd Woods catching and backed up by Chester Tackaberry, Ben Morrison, Bill Haight, Gordon Auckland, Herb Hayes, Art Nicholson and Ray Lawson. They played against a Keatley team, winning the game. At supper time the ladies of the district set long tables in the partly finished livery barn of William Burke, where a basket supper was enjoyed by all. After speeches and toasts to the new "Speers" everyone adjourned to the new Pool Hall, of Mike Turcotte, where they danced 'til the wee hours of the morning. Music was supplied by volunteers.

At dedication time Speers had two lumber yards. The Galvin, with Gordon Auckland as manager, and the Western Canada Sawmills with Russell Farrow, as manager. The Galvin office was around on Railway Avenue, near the Hotel Corner. The Western was near where the Andy Walker home is now. Before joining the Western Canada Sawmills Company, Mr. Farrow had homesteaded east of here, near the Will Scott homestead.

Also, it had two elevators, which were nearing completion. The Saskatchewan, later the Searle Grain Company, had T. C. Crowter as its first agent. He bought his first three loads of grain from Kinash, Clarence Bush and Will Curry. Second, the British American Grain Company, now the National Grain, with Ernie Harms as agent. To Mr. Harms goes the honour of receiving the first load of grain to be delivered at this point.

The Turner Elevator Company, now the McCabe Bros., built their elevator in 1914. Their first buyer was Fred Ves-

sey. To this elevator Jack McKeen took the first load of grain, for which he received a crate of plums as a premium. The fourth elevator to be built here was the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Company, now the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, in 1915. Its first agent was Joe Fardy.

The first three frame houses to be erected here were those of S. Brevick, Ernie Harms and G. R. Lawson. Mrs. Brevick kept a boarding house until the Hotel was built. Brevick's is now the Eldon MacLeod home.

Mr. Tom Miller built the Hotel where it still stands, in 1915. It had a full basement, is 40 by 60 feet with two storeys. It opened on September 22nd, 1915 and showed Mr. Miller's confidence in the new district. Across the street from the Hotel stood the General Store of G. R. Lawson. Mr. Lawson had the first store in Speers. His store stood on the corner where Bruce McKeen's Service Station is now.

The Canadian National Railway branch from Prince Albert to North Battleford was built during 1913. The construction men were running low on supplies when they were working here. Fred Thomas was the first to sell them a supply of potatoes, carrots and several dozens of eggs. They ran construction trains without carrying passengers until January of 1914. Mr. S. I. McKeen was a passenger on that first train to Speers, on January 20th, and Mrs. Roy Miner and Mr. Roy Moore were passengers leaving here on it. During the winter of 1913 Mr. J. Hickman lived beside the tracks in a converted box-car and cared for C.N.R. properties. There was not an agent until Ted Marlow came after the present depot was built in 1914.

The first Postmaster Speers had was Mr. W.G. Scott. He received the post in March of 1914. Before that the mail was driven to Baird's store from Maymont and marked "New Ottawa". Will Curry took over the office in November of that same year.

Speers' first hall was the "Princess". It was a community venture, financed by the selling of shares. Later it was bought by Mr. R. J. Scott, but he retained the name of "Princess" on it.

Speers was first administered as a municipal area. Taxes were paid to the Douglas Municipal Office, in Richard. The first sidewalks were laid while it

was administered like this. It received official incorporation as the "Village of Speers" on December 27, 1916. The first elected Council was J. R. Morrison; Gordon Auckland and Tom Miller, with J. R. Morrison as Overseer. They held the first council meeting on January 17, 1917. S. Chivers-Wilson was the first secretary for Speers. Tom Crowter audited the books for 1915-16 and 17. This led to his becoming village Secretary on May 6, 1918. He has continued as the Village Secretary—making thirty-two years of very faithful service to date.

The children of Speers had no school in 1913. For them it meant a walk of three miles to the Corbett School. Then for a short time they went to Green Bluff while plans were being made for them to have classes in the Princess Hall. These classes started May 15, 1916 with Miss M. H. Howe in charge. Miss Howe's salary was \$65.00 per month. The first school board had as chairman G. R. Lawson, also W. Curry and Harold Wilson. S. Chivers Wilson was secretary.

Tenders were called in 1916 for the building of a school house in the village. The contract was awarded to W. J. Burrows for \$1235.00. The new school opened on January 15, 1917, with Miss Beatrice Miller as teacher.

During the fall of 1913, the New Ottawa Methodist Manse was moved from Green Bluff to Speers. Rev. M. M. Culp was the minister. He continued to hold services in the school until the Princess Hall was built, then services were conducted there. On May 25, 1918 the present United Church was opened and dedicated with special services held both morning and evening.

The McRae Bros., Joe and Bill had the first Hardware Store. Clyde Tillotson was our first Blacksmith. He also had a Butcher Shop, but sold out shortly to Mr. Olsen who had his shop where William Huziak now has his shop. Mr. Olsen specialized in horse-shoeing. Mr. Will Scott had the first Real Estate Office to be in our village.

The Speers "Signal" office was on Main Street. J. D. Taylor was the manager. The Signal, a weekly publication, did much to keep the people informed on local affairs in a day before local telephones or radio. Several copies of the first edition of the Signal are around. They are treasured possessions

of any who have them.

The Speers Telephone Company was organized in 1916. J. A. McKeen was one of the organizers and its first president. He had the honour of having his telephone installed first - July 20th.

Speers was just one year old when the 1914 to 1918 war broke out. Many of the young men from here enlisted right away. The closest Enlistment Depot was in North Battleford, so it is very hard to tell just who was the first to join up. The first boy to pay the supreme sacrifice was John Teesdale, who had farmed land now owned by T. H. Wright. During war years Speers had a very active Red Cross Society. They had countless raffles, dances and socials to raise the hundreds of dollars which they sent out. On more than one occasion more than half of the men at a dance would be in uniform. Music for the dances was supplied by volunteers. Jack and Billie McKeen, Faulkie Miller, Alex Foulds and Jack Smale were a few of the many faithful helpers.

Before the boys returned in 1918 and 1919, the Returned Soldiers Welcome and Aid League was formed. It welcomed the boys back and gave them gold pocket watches which were suitably engraved with their name and the date.

The year of 1915 seems to have been the year of the building boom, as during that summer the following business places were opened: Scott & Co., General Store; H. Chivers-Wilson - Drug Store; W. Kerchin - Harness Shop; Ehmke Bros. - Blacksmith Shop; George Smith - Confectionery; Thos. Hillier - Hotel; Misses Dick and Bell - Millinery; J. D. Taylor - Newspaper and Job Printing.

The years had moulded Speers into a well knit little village. It is a friendly and wide awake community, always ready to do its share to assist with any worthy cause.

When the local Chapter of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire was organized in January of 1944, they chose as their name "The New Ottawa Chapter" in honour, and as a tribute to those brave and courageous men and women who laid the foundations of our community. May we be ever worthy of the sacrifices and the vision of these, our pioneers.



Bruce's Service Station

BRUCE McKEEN, PROP.

Plymouth - Chrysler - Fargo

Case Implements

Speers, Sask.

— PHONE 42 —

ANDREW SWARTLING

John Deere Farm Equipment

North Star Oil

Speers, Sask.

Corner Grocery &

Confectionery

Light Lunches Served

J. A. Guenter & Son, Prop.

— SERVICE WITH A SMILE —

W. G. SCOTT

Lands - Loans - Insurance

Phones: Business 32; Residence 19

Speers, Sask.